

BARRINGTON WATSON PROPERTY AD-HOC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

Regular Meeting

7:00 p.m. Wednesday, January 19, 2022

Meeting Held Via Zoom

1. Call to Order and Confirm Quorum

Acting Chair Hervey called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

In attendance: Matt Amaral, David Beal, Kathleen Berard, Christopher Brady (Housing Board of Trustees Alternate), David Butera, Lynne Carter (Resilience and Energy Committee Alternate), Annelise Conway, Teresa Crean (Incoming Chair as new Director of Planning, Building, and Resiliency), Carla DeStefano, Kelly Chinnners Reiss, Jordan Durham, Mary Grenier, Diane Lipscombe, Susan McCalmont, Ted Myatt, Erin Paquette, Thomas Peck, Roni Phipps, and Fletch Thomson

Also in attendance: Eric Army, Signal Works Architecture; Ashley Cullion, landscape architect from consultant team; Isabelle Gillibrand, Clerk to the Watson Ad-Hoc Committee; Keelia Kentor, master planner from the consultant team; Todd Poole, 4ward Planning

2. Approve Meeting Minutes – December 15, 2021

MOTION: Member Chinnners Reiss made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 15, 2021 meeting. Member Conway seconded the motion and it carried unanimously, with Member Brady abstaining.

3. Committee Member Introductions (New Members)

Town Manager Hervey announced he would be stepping down as chair, and the new Town Planner, Teresa Crean would be taking his place. Chair Crean introduced herself and her background.

The new abutter representatives introduced themselves to the Committee, including Mary Grenier of 10 Watson Avenue, Diane Lipscombe of 6 Watson Avenue, and David Butera of 275 Nayatt Road, each noting their residency in Barrington and excitement to serve on the Committee.

4. Visioning Findings

Keelia Kentor re-introduced herself for the new members of the Committee and the public. Kentor reviewed the community engagement efforts so far, and Eric Army added a review of what has occurred so far with the visioning process and the next steps, including potential Comprehensive Plan amendments, and drafting a Request for Proposal (RFP).

Kentor reviewed the visioning process and meetings thus far:

- Findings from the Visioning Kickoff at the November 15, 2021 meeting, including (but not limited to) affordable senior housing, and preserving and creating open space.
- Public Engagement Comments from the December 15 2021 meeting, including need for community involvement, density and parking concerns, and questions regarding the financial impact for both the residents of the neighborhood and the Town.
- Review of online public comments from June to December 2021, which included themes of specialized housing (such as affordable and senior housing), creating a cultural and/or educational facility, and conservation and community space for the land itself. Kentor also reviewed the findings from that survey involving opinions of preserving versus demolishing the existing monastery building.
- Stakeholder Group Interviews. Kentor noted that seven were invited, and of those three groups responded:
 - Rhode Island School of Design, interviewed on December 17, 2021, who noted concerns such as parking and asked about the potential of making the property a single-family residence.
 - The Barrington Village, interviewed on December 27, 2021. At that meeting the 2018 Age-Friendly Barrington Study was noted, which showed a desire and demand for multi-generational living, variety of housing at different income levels, and concern with limited options to downsize and stay in town as one ages.
 - The Barrington Land Trust, interviewed on December 29, 2021. The Trust expressed interest in preserving the land, specifically the forested areas, an idea to create a connection between the Watson property and Rhode Island School of Design property for wildlife access, and the opportunity for this project to support the Trust's Pollinator Pathways initiatives. They also expressed interested in being part of the planning process.

Kentor concluded the presentation noting themes throughout all these meetings, including essential community engagement and input, transparent communication, being mindful of the residents in the neighborhood including traffic, illegal beach access, and density.

5. Initial Market Analysis Findings

Todd Poole then began the second presentation to review the market study findings, noting how the goal of the study was to show what options would be market receptive.

Poole reviewed the market study's methodology, key findings, and takeaways, including that:

- Lack of housing choice and high cost is likely a barrier for younger households looking to rent and seniors looking to downsize.
- New active adult housing could help meeting demand for an aging baby boomer population
- The MAGIC housing model (Multi-ability/Multi-Generational Inclusive Community)

Poole defined terms used in the presentation, including “active adult” and “missing middle housing.” Poole then reviewed statistics including household formation, age cohort growth patterns, a map of single-family detached houses in Barrington, graphs depicting housing tenure and vulnerable households in Barrington compared to the surrounding areas, reviewed supply and demand analysis, and key findings.

6. Summary of Building Assessment & Evaluation

Eric Army began the third presentation reviewing the building assessment and evaluation. Army opened the presentation by reviewing the context of the building, including its current zoning, soil types, and site utilities.

Ashley Cullion then reviewed a circulation diagram to discuss site constraints, including floodplains and wetlands. Army then reviewed more about topography, the site itself (such as square footage, lot coverage, and the monastery building) through site photos. Army reviewed what utilities would need replacement, including electrical, mechanical, and plumbing, if the building moved forward as a adaptive re-use. Army then reviewed floor plans of the monastery building.

Chair Crean opened questions and comments to the Committee. The Committee discussed building feasibility, developer interest in the property, whether the Town must make a profit on the property, parking concerns and when a traffic study will be conducted, the potential of subdividing the lots and selling them off individually to recuperate funds, and discussion on the MAGIC concept discussed during the market study presentation from Poole.

7. Committee Guidance: Key Issues

For each Crean reviewed the consultant’s findings and asked for Committee’s feedback to create a summary recommendation to the Town Council.

- **Town Facilities**

Comments from the Committee included the potential and want to create an education center on the property, such as a nature education site; however, a teen facility does not seem to fit with the property being in a more isolated part of Town. Other members commented that there should not be any recreational facilities on the property but to keep it solely as residential and open space. Several of the community representative members commented on the concern about traffic in the area.

- **Outdoor Public Spaces / Nature Access - Local vs Destination**

Comments from the Committee included preservation of the land, avoiding over development, the importance of green space due to Barrington’s lack of it, the importance of

providing public access to use the space, and that there is the opportunity for both green space and housing to be part of this site.

- **Parking - Induced Demand or Relieving Issues**

Comments from the Committee included the importance for resident access and not having to pay for parking and creating a balance of access without overwhelming traffic in the neighborhood. There was discussion about whether there are statistics about how much of the land in Town is usable open space, and if it would be possible to get that data.

- **Renewable Energy / Sustainable Design**

There was overwhelming support that renewable energy should be considered with development. Town Manager Hervey asked Army about the existing building and feasibility of incorporating renewable energy to it. Some of the members asked and discussed the potential of extending out renewable energy to the neighborhood. Town Manager Hervey also expressed the want to have electric vehicle charging on site.

- **Housing Goals – Unit Types / Senior and Non-Senior Housing, Affordable Housing**

The Committee discussed how they appreciate need for the “missing middle” in town, and to achieve affordable housing with existing neighborhood, but to keep realistic considerations of what town can do and what a developer would likely want to do. Other considerations included to not be boxed in with the number of units, but to leave that open-ended through the feasibility study. The Committee also discussed the feasibility of having entrances to the property on both Watson and Freemont to help with traffic. Several Committee members reiterated the need to balance community goals with the neighborhood’s goals.

- **Preservation of the Existing Building**

Several members noted that they do not want to rule out any options, but to see what the consultants come back with regarding what is feasible.

- **Other**

Town Manager Hervey noted it will be important to present market study at the joint session with Town Council, especially in moving into the next stages of the project. Several members worry about the number of units presented during the market study and fear it would skew the direction of the project. Member Conway noted the importance of context, and that the market study is one component. Concerns that the neighborhood’s property values would be affected was also brought up as a concern.

Chair Crean thanked everyone for their comments as the summary and recommendation to the Town Council is drafted.

8. Adjourn

MOTION: Member Phipps made a motion to adjourn at 9:36 p.m., and the meeting was adjourned.